

# **Idaho Press Club**

## ***Best of 2019***

**Megan Stark – Idaho Transportation Department**

### **News Releases**

- Selection of Three



# News Release

9/11/2019

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## ITD initiates efforts to make safety improvements to ID-47 and US-20 through the city of Ashton

ASHTON – Following a speed study of traffic on [US-20 through the city of Ashton](#), the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is recommending several safety improvements. This will include installing flashing yellow lights, school zone signs and reducing speeds while school is in session.

ITD has already made several safety improvements at the intersection of Idaho Highway 47 and US-20. ITD crews have installed a flashing "stop ahead" warning sign, a flashing stop sign and rumble strips to alert drivers approaching the intersection on ID-47.

ITD's engineering analysis for US-20 through Ashton has determined the speed limit should only drop to 35 mph during transition times for school. During the rest of the day, the speed will remain at 45 mph.

ITD must be consistent statewide and ensure speed limits are set according to Idaho law.

In 2012, the Idaho Legislature passed HB619 directing ITD and the Idaho Transportation Board to set speed limits on state highways within city limits. The legislation says, in part, *"In establishing speed limits within city limits, ITD must do an investigation and base posted speeds on sound traffic engineering safety standards."*

Nationwide, traffic analyses for speed limits include the determination of the 85th percentile. This means traffic data is collected to determine what speed the majority of drivers are comfortable traveling.

"When speed limits are not set at the speed drivers are traveling, there is a greater chance for speed variance between vehicles," said ITD Eastern Idaho Engineering Manager Wade Allen. "Reducing the speed limit below the 85th percentile speed can result in conditions that are unsafe."

The US-20 speed study in Ashton included a thorough analysis of crash rate, traffic volumes, road condition, access points, number of lanes, bicycle/pedestrian use and roadside development along US-20 through the city of Ashton.

ITD is committed to make additional safety improvements to the intersection, including installing flashing lights on speed limit reduction (65 mph to 45 mph) signs, and installing dynamic "Your Speed" signs for southbound traffic (northbound sign already exists).

ITD also has a future project to add a signal light at the intersection of US-20 and ID-47, which is currently scheduled for Fiscal Year 2023.

For more information, please click on the following links to learn more about [how ITD sets speed limits](#) and to see the [ITD Speed Limit brochure](#).

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# News Release

1/2/2019

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## Public Hearing to gather comments on Targhee Pass Environmental Assessment set for January 17 in Island Park

ISLAND PARK – The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have released the Targhee Pass Environmental Assessment (EA) and invite the public to participate in a hearing on **January 17** to ask questions and provide comments.

The hearing will take place from **4 p.m. to 7 p.m.** at the Island Park EMS Building, 4124 County Circle Road, in Island Park. The Targhee Pass EA evaluates the risks, benefits, opportunities and costs associated with reconstruction of Targhee Pass (U.S. 20 between the junction with Idaho Highway 87 and the Montana state line).

The hearing will be in open-house format, so citizens are encouraged to attend any time during the three-hour period. EA findings will be on display, and the public will have the opportunity to give written or verbal comment. Hearing materials will also be made available on the study website ([www.islandparkus20.com](http://www.islandparkus20.com)) the day of the hearing for those unavailable to attend in-person. Attending the public hearing is not a requirement for submitting a comment. Comments can also be submitted via:

- **Phone:** (208) 220-5937
- **Email:** [targheepass@langdongroupinc.com](mailto:targheepass@langdongroupinc.com)
- **Regular Mail:** Idaho Transportation Department District 6 (Attn: Public Information Specialist) P.O. Box 97, Rigby, ID 83442-0097

Comments pertaining to the Targhee Pass EA through any of the above methods will become part of the record for this project and may be submitted through Feb. 1, 2019.

"ITD looked at a number of possible alternatives to improve roadway structural integrity, traffic flow and safety of the Targhee Pass segment of U.S. 20, and identified Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative," said ITD project manager Derek Noyes. "ITD encourages the public to review the findings in the EA and welcomes stakeholder feedback on the document at the public hearing or any time between now and February 1."

Roadway improvements included with Alternative 3 (and all of the build alternatives) are:

- An additional travel lane in the uphill direction from ID-87 to the Montana State line
- Shoulder widening from 5 feet to 8 feet
- Hill cut to improve stopping sight distance
- Left-and-right-turn lanes into Big Horn Hills Estates entrances
- Tree clearing to reduce shade
- Road subsurface reconstruction and drainage improvements

In addition to the roadway improvements, Alternative 3 would include installation of an animal detection system throughout the 4-mile segment of U.S. 20. The system would alert drivers to the presence of animals. This alternative does not include crossing structures with wildlife fencing.

ITD's considerations for preferring Alternative 3 include:

- No easements would be required on private or Federal lands.

- Alternative 3 would not require installation of cattle guards/electric mats and pedestrian access gates, such as entrances to Big Horn Hills Estates.
- Local elected officials have communicated that they do not support wildlife crossings and fencing as improvements for the U.S. 20 corridor.
- Implementing Alternative 3 would provide an opportunity to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions on Targhee Pass. This would partially support objectives of the State Wildlife Action Plan and recommendations of the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy by reducing mortality. Fremont County Commissioners have indicated through a land use plan resolution (April 2018) that they would support animal-detection systems for reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions.
- Targhee Pass has high seasonal variability in traffic volume. Major wildlife movements take place when traffic volumes are lower in off-tourism and recreation seasons. The permeability for wildlife movement has not been shown to be impacting large mammal populations.
- On a statewide and districtwide priority, the Targhee Pass location does not have the highest frequency of wildlife vehicle collisions. With limited funding, priority locations that have a greater safety benefit should be implemented prior to wildlife crossing through the Targhee Pass area.

Targhee Pass is a four-mile portion of the US-20 corridor that was evaluated as a part of a safety corridor planning effort from Chester to the Montana State Line. In addition to serving Yellowstone National Park, Targhee Pass serves many popular recreational and tourist destinations. The highway functions as the region's Main Street, providing primary access to year-round residences, vacation homes, hunting and fishing lodges, state park and national forest areas, and a variety of community commercial establishments.

A print copy of the EA is available for review at the Island Park City Offices, Fremont County Planning & Zoning Office, the Fremont District Library (Island Park Branch), the ITD District 6 office in Rigby, ITD headquarters in Boise, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Offices in Boise. The EA as well as other project-related information are also available on [www.islandparkus20.com](http://www.islandparkus20.com) and the ITD website at: <https://itd.idaho.gov/d6/>.

FHWA is the lead agency for the EA. The EA is being completed in accordance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). For more information, please contact Andrea Gumm at 208-220-5937 or [targheepass@landgongroupinc.com](mailto:targheepass@landgongroupinc.com).

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# News Release

2/25/2019

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## **UPDATE: Winter weather advisory for East Idaho encourages public to prepare travels ahead of time**

UPDATE: East Idaho currently has a total of eight road closures due to blowing and drifting snow and low visibility. The following lists the current roads that are closed:

- US-20: Idaho Falls to US-26
- US-20: Ashton to Montana State Line
- ID-87
- ID-47
- ID-32
- ID-33: Newdale to Teton
- ID-20/26/93: Carey to Arco
- ID-34: Blackfoot River Road to Wyoming State Line

Due to severe weather, the road closures are estimated to take several days to open with weather permitting. Additional resources are being dedicated to re-open the roads as quickly as feasible.

ITD strongly recommends that no one attempts to travel in these areas as local roads are likewise impacted by continuous storm conditions. Please check road conditions and closures on Idaho's traveler advisory service at [511.idaho.gov](http://511.idaho.gov) or call 5-1-1.

### **\*\*\*Original News Release\*\*\***

EAST IDAHO - The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and the National Weather Service (NWS) are advising the traveling public to use caution while in transit due to a severe winter weather advisory beginning Saturday (**Feb. 23**) for an extended period of time. Expect high winds, blowing and drifting snow, low visibility and heavy snow in higher elevations.

ITD advises drivers to plan accordingly as the weather proceeds. Expect intermittent road closures as forecasted increases of wind speed and precipitation may require a halt in snow clearing operations if conditions become too dangerous for plows to operate.

"We are expecting some substantial winds and snowfall along with very low temperatures" says ITD District 6 Operations Manager Wade Allen. "Starting tomorrow, our crews will be working around the clock to keep roads open, but they expect to close roads as weather proceeds and it is deemed unsafe for them to plow."

Allen also noted, "We urge all travelers to plan your drive ahead of time in the instance roads may be closed. Check 511 and please drive safe!"

Please check road conditions and closures on Idaho's traveler advisory service at [511.idaho.gov](http://511.idaho.gov) or call 5-1-1.

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